

THE FIRST PERFIN COLLECTOR?

Brian Birch

If you were asked the date when perfin stamps were first collected, I suppose that like me you would guess that there were a few eccentrics collecting them in the UK at the turn of the century and in the USA, a decade or so later. This discrepancy simply reflecting the relatively late date when they were introduced into the States. Few, I venture to say, would suggest 1872!

In the 1860's when both stamp collecting and stamp publications were in their infancy, one woman, Adelaide Lucy Fenton stood out even amongst the men (Note 1). In spite of her renown, she was the first lady philatelist to present a paper to the Royal Philatelic Society

London (Note 2), very little is known about her life except that she lived in a house called St John's Villa in Clifton near Bristol (Note 3). However, her writings in the earliest stamp magazines under the pen names Fentonia, Herbert Camoens (her favorite Portuguese poet) and SJV (after the name of her house) remain as a powerful testament to her outstanding knowledge and ability.

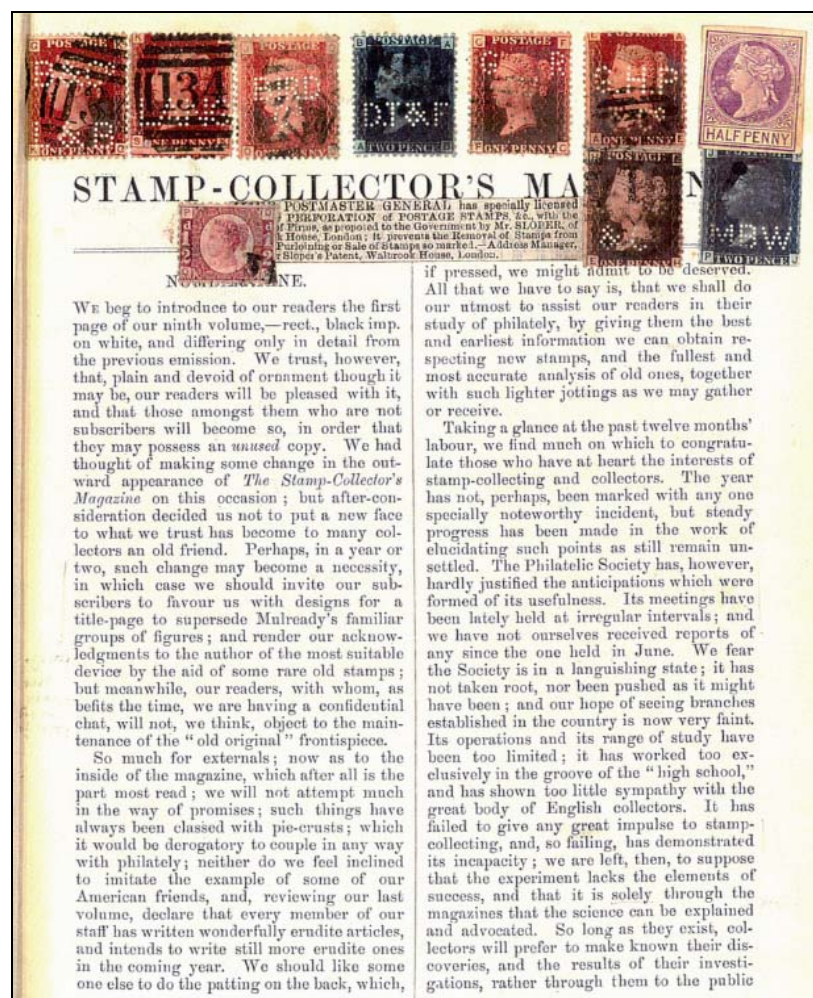


Figure 1. The *Stamp Collectors Magazine*, Volume 9 of 1871, with nine perfin stamps and an underprint attached.

The most important of these early periodicals was *The Stamp Collector's Magazine*, first published in 1863, followed a few years later by *The Philatelist*. It was to these magazines that Miss Fenton contributed for over a decade. As thanks for her contributions, each year the publishers sent her the previous year's volume, beautifully bound and suitably inscribed. As the true student that she undoubtedly was, Miss Fenton studied each volume in depth and annotated many articles with her own observations and views, often adding appropriate newspaper cuttings, letters and even stamps. Some three decades later, presumably after her death, these magnificent sets of periodicals were sold at auction and purchased by the Royal (Note 4).

During a visit to the Royal Philatelic Society London to further my non-perfin researches in their magnificent library, I decided to look through their run of *The Stamp Collector's Magazine*. Imagine my surprise when I opened Volume 9 of 1871 to find a small collection of ten British stamps stuck on the first page of Issue 1 (Fig. 1). All of the stamps were perfins except the small ½d, which carried an underprint from Copestake. Moore, Crampton & Co, London. The stamps were arranged around a cutting from a newspaper, unfortunately with no attribution, announcing the acceptance by the Post Office of perforating as a means of protecting stamps from theft.

Since the volume was a presentation to Miss Fenton from the publisher and came into the hands of the Royal directly from her library it is likely that she secured the stamps in position in 1872, the year that she received the volume or shortly thereafter. The early 1d red plate numbers, used between 1869 and 1871 seem to confirm this.

The following table analyses the stamps starting from the top left:

B&Co/L&B	1d red, plate 161
LANG	1d red, plate 122?
BIRD/Co	1d red, plate 154
D.T & F	2d blue, plate 14
GWR	1d red, plate 145
G.H.P/&Co	1d red, plate 156
GWR	postal stationery cut-out
Underprint	½d, plate?
CTS/&Co	1d red, plate 148?
MBW	2d blue, plate 13

Notes

1. The original letter of thanks from Judge F.A. Philbrick, the Vice President of the Society, was carefully taped into her copy of the issue of the magazine in which her paper was published as: "Fentonia: The secret marks on the stamps of Peru", *The Stamp Collectors Magazine*, January 1874, Volume 12, Issue 1, pp 11-13. It was followed by an anonymous report on the meeting, which Miss Fenton notes in her copy of the magazine was written by Judge Philbrick: "Meeting of the Philatelic Society, London" *The Stamp Collector's Magazine*, January 1874. Volume 12, Issue 1, pp 13-15.

2. The Royal Philatelic Society London was founded in 1869 as The Philatelic Society, London and did not receive its prefix "Royal" until 1906. The comma between the words Society and London was only dropped in recent years.

3. In the absence of a biography, the reverential references in the Society's history provide an indication of her standing amongst early philatelists. (Baron Percy de Worms: *The Royal Philatelic Society, London. 1869-April 10th - 1919*, Royal Philatelic Society. London 1919, pp 11 & 26.)

4. It is recorded on page twenty of the Society's history of its first hundred years (*The Royal Philatelic Society London 1869-1969*, Royal Philatelic Society, London, UK. 1969) that the Royal acquired this set of volumes in 1909. This was probably from Ventom, Bull & Cooper, who auctioned some items from Miss Fenton's library in May of that year (*Catalogue of British, Foreign & Colonial Postage Stamps*, Ventom, Bull & Cooper. 305th Sale, 13 May 1909). Examination of my copy of the sale catalogue showed that the philatelic literature was confined to lots 381-397. Lot 381 was *The Stamp Collector's Magazine* (Stafford Smith & Smith, Bath, 144 Issues in twelve volumes, 1863-74) described as presentation volumes given to Fentonia, as was the following lot, 382: *The Philatelist* (Stafford Smith & Co., Brighton. 121 Issues in ten volumes, 1866-76). I had previously noticed a complete set of *The Philatelist* on the shelf next to *The Stamp Collector's Magazine* in the Royal's library. On checking, this set also proved to be Miss Fenton's. Evidently, someone at the Royal was astute enough to realize the significance of these unique volumes and raised the £32 that Lot 381 and the £10 that Lot 382 brought.